

Toronto

Vaccines, protests, flashes of normalcy: This is what 2021 looked like in the Toronto area

These are our photographer Evan Mitsui's most memorable photos of 2021

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From professional sports and the arts to emergency airlifts for COVID-19 patients to the search for missing residential school children, there was no shortage of news in Toronto and the GTHA in 2021. (Evan Mitsui/CBC)

Many Torontonians are emerging from 2021 feeling exhausted — worn out by 12 months of tumultuous ups and downs.

It was the year that saw the arrival of COVID-19 vaccines and a much-needed return to some normalcy — including concerts, indoor gatherings and sports games. But 2021 also saw city streets filled by protests and vigils as Torontonians spoke out on issues such as Islamophobia and the horror of Canada's residential schools.

CBC's photographer Evan Mitsui was there for all of it.

Scroll down to see his most memorable photos taken in and around Toronto in 2021.

The rise of variants

As the pandemic continued into its second year, Ontarians were forced to learn the names of a string of dangerous new COVID-19 variants.

In January, the Alpha variant ripped through Roberta Place long-term care home in Barrie, Ont., killing 63 residents in less than a month. In this shot, the body of a deceased resident is removed from the home on Jan. 18.





(Evan Mitsui/CBC)

The first COVID-19 vaccines were given out in Canada in mid-December 2020. As 2021 began, the shots were prioritized for health-care workers, Indigenous adults and the elderly.

In this photo, a team from Humber River Hospital administers first doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine to parishioners of St. Fidelis Parish church on March 17.



(Evan Mitsui/CBC)

Esther and Eduardo Teodoro, 75, are pictured [in the intensive care unit at Scarborough Health Network's Centenary Hospital](#) on April 8 as Eduardo recuperates from COVID-19.





(Evan Mitsui/CBC)

- **Critical condition: Inside a Toronto hospital system at a crisis point amid 3rd wave**

As Ontario's vaccination campaign gathered steam, anti-vaccine protests became a regular sight in downtown Toronto.

On Sept. 2, hundreds of people gathered in front of Toronto police headquarters for an anti-mandatory vaccination rally — one day after the Ontario government announced a vaccine passport system effective Sept. 22.





(Evan Mitsui/CBC)

By fall 2021, Ontario's case numbers had gone down substantially, freeing up health-care resources to help other, harder-hit provinces.

In this Oct. 27 photo, a patient from Saskatchewan is transferred from an air ambulance to a waiting Peel Region ambulance at Pearson airport. The Ontario Critical Care COVID Command Centre transported COVID-19 patients to Ontario ICUs to alleviate the strain on the Saskatchewan health-care system.



(Evan Mitsui/CBC)

Ontario's vaccine rollout was not without controversy.

Here, Ontario's deputy premier Christine Elliott is pictured taking questions from media on Nov. 3. The brief news conference followed an announcement that COVID-19 vaccines would not be mandatory for health-care workers, a decision which the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario later called "a disgrace."



(Evan Mitsui/CBC)

Protests, rallies and vigils

In May, escalating violence and deadly airstrikes from Israel into Gaza led to pro-Palestinian rallies in cities across Canada — including in Toronto's Nathan Phillips Square on May 15.





(Evan Mitsui/CBC)

Later that same month, Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation in British Columbia announced that preliminary findings from a survey of the grounds at a former residential school building had uncovered the potential burial sites of 215 children, later revised to 200. Nationally, the announcement prompted a wave of sadness, horror and anger.

Below, a statue of Egerton Ryerson, one of the founders of Canada's residential school system, lies on the grounds of the Toronto university that bears his name, after being toppled on June 6.





(Evan Mitsui/CBC)

- **[PHOTOS | Ryerson statue toppled in Toronto following march, rally](#)**

June also brought a reckoning on Islamophobia after four members of the Afzaal family were killed in an attack while they were out for a weekend evening stroll in London, Ont.

On June 8, thousands attended a vigil for the family at the London Muslim Mosque, including Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who called the attack an "act of terrorism" during his speech.



(Evan Mitsui/CBC)

- **PHOTOS | Thousands attend vigil in London, Ont., to grieve loss of Afzaal family**

As the summer wore on, there were more announcements about the discovery of remains at residential schools, and [Canada Day plans were altered by most GTA municipalities as a result](#).

On July 1 at Nathan Phillips Square, Every Child Matters organized a gathering in memory of the victims and survivors of residential schools.



(Evan Mitsui/CBC)

This summer also brought a police crackdown on encampments in city parks.

On July 21, 26 people were arrested at Toronto's Lamport Stadium park as the city and police forcibly evicted people living there and clashed violently with encampment supporters.



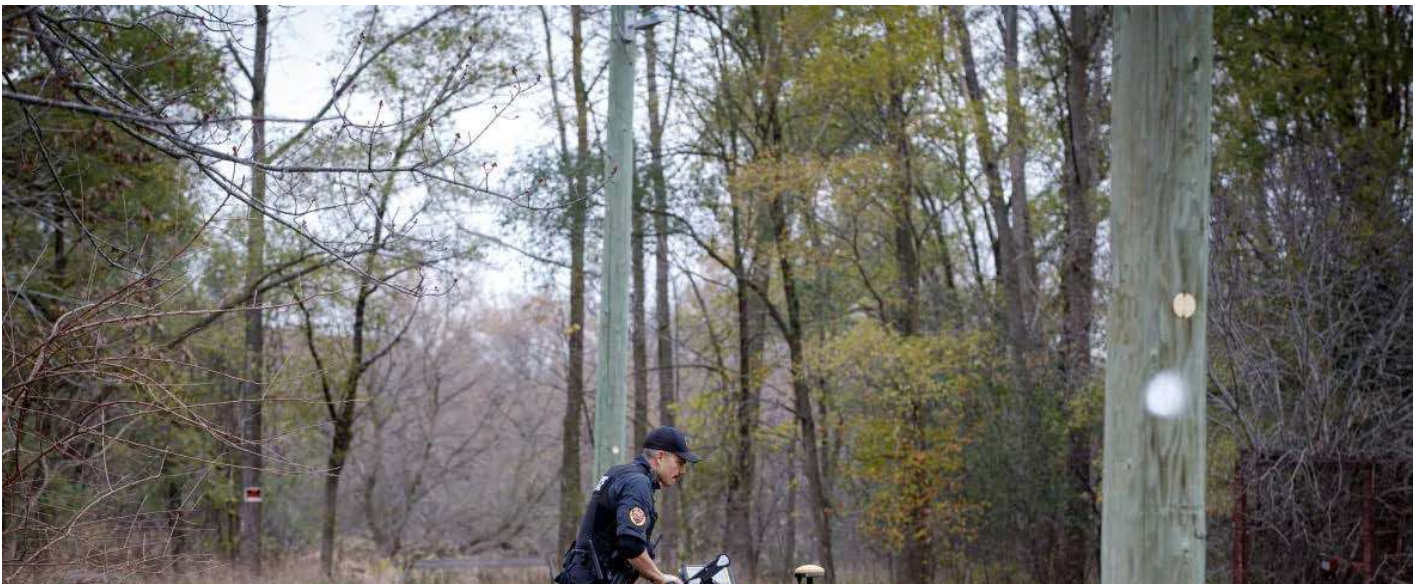


(Evan Mitsui/CBC)

A search begins in Brantford

After repeated calls from survivors and from Six Nations, elected chief Mark Hill, a ground-penetrating radar search began at the former Mohawk Institute Residential School in Brantford, Ont., on Nov. 9.

The work of searching for missing children on the more than 200 hectares of land once controlled by the school is expected to take more than a year.





(Evan Mitsui/CBC)

Residential school survivor Al Johnson stood outside the former Mohawk Institute Residential School on the day the search began.

According to the [Survivors' Secretariat](#), which is overseeing the search effort, children from some 20 First Nation communities were abused at the school over 150 years.

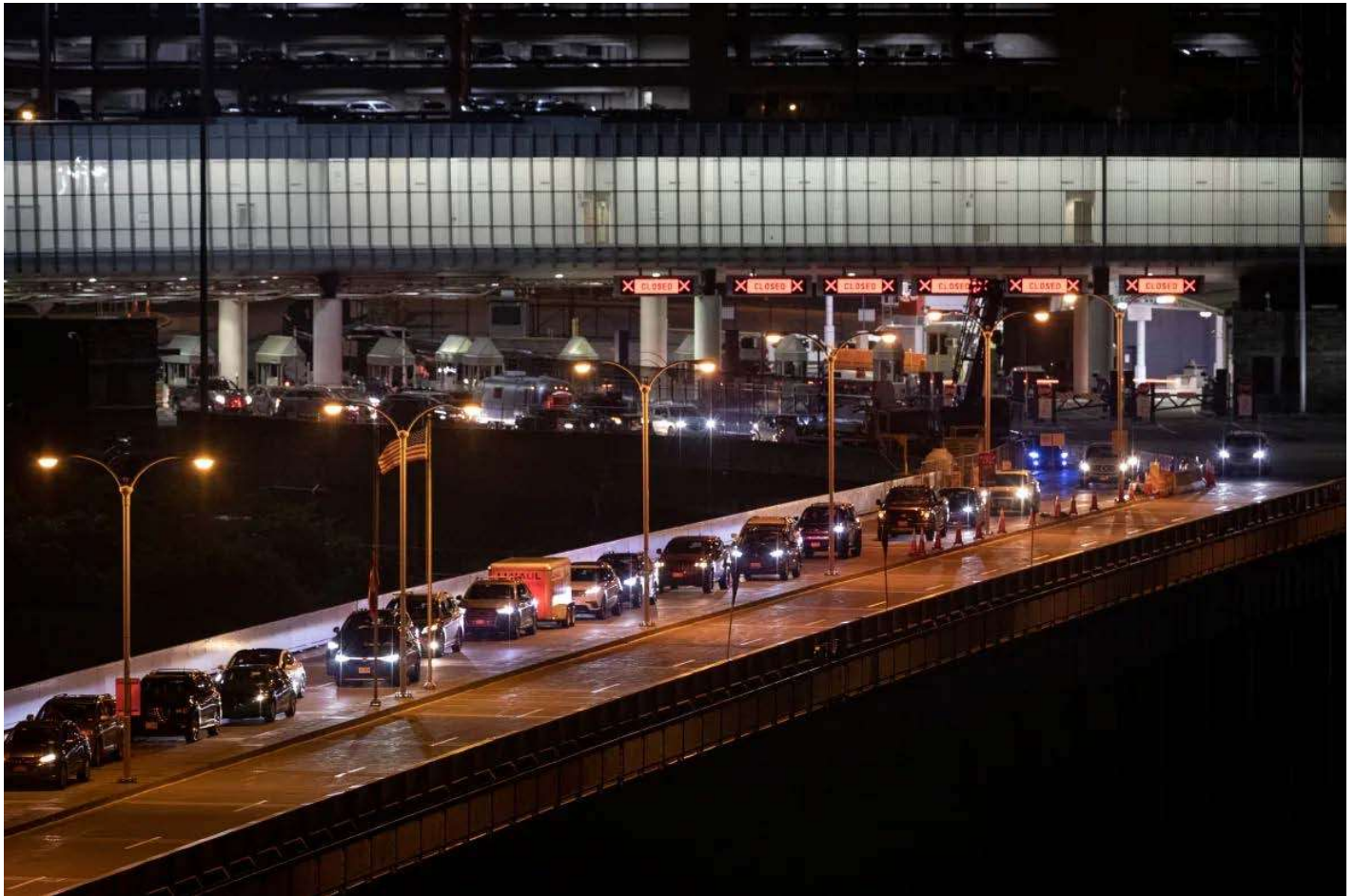


(Evan Mitsui/CBC)

The land border reopens — haltingly

On Aug. 9, Canada reopened its land border to fully vaccinated Americans, allowing them to skip the previous mandatory 14-day quarantine. In a rush to visit, a lineup of U.S. cars queued to get into the country at the Rainbow International Bridge in Niagara Falls.

The U.S. did not reciprocate in [opening its land border to Canadians until November](#).



(Evan Mitsui/CBC)

Kids head cautiously back to school

Concerns swirled about COVID-19 protocols in the lead up to back to school this September, which saw two million students return to classrooms for the first time in five months.

In this photo, Sasha Mitsui, 3, gets a COVID-19 swab test at Michael Garron Hospital on Aug. 1 as the result of a daycare-related exposure a few weeks before school began.



(Evan Mitsui/CBC)

Finn Misener, 6, hugs his mother Jenn before lining up for his first day of Grade 1 at Spring Valley Elementary School in Ancaster, Ont., on Sept. 8.





(Evan Mitsui/CBC)

Many parents breathed a sigh of relief in late November, when COVID-19 vaccines opened for kids aged five to 11.

Eli Stern, with his mother Hyla Robicsek's hand on his shoulder, got a pediatric dose of the COVID-19 vaccine at a Humber River Hospital-run clinic in North York on Nov. 25.



(Evan Mitsui/CBC)

- [PHOTOS | Kids' vaccinations against COVID-19 underway in Canada](#)

Celebrations light up the year

Through the year, Torontonians took comfort in celebrating annual holidays and religious events.

On July 20, Toronto-area Muslims celebrated Eid al-Adha at a group prayer and outdoor event held at Ontario Place.



(Evan Mitsui/CBC)

- [**PHOTOS | How Eid al-Adha is being celebrated globally amid COVID-19 restrictions**](#)

Diwali was heralded as a "light at the end of the tunnel" this year, with people able to get together with friends and family once again.

Here, people attend a prayer session at the Hindu Sabha temple, in Brampton, Ont., on Nov. 4.





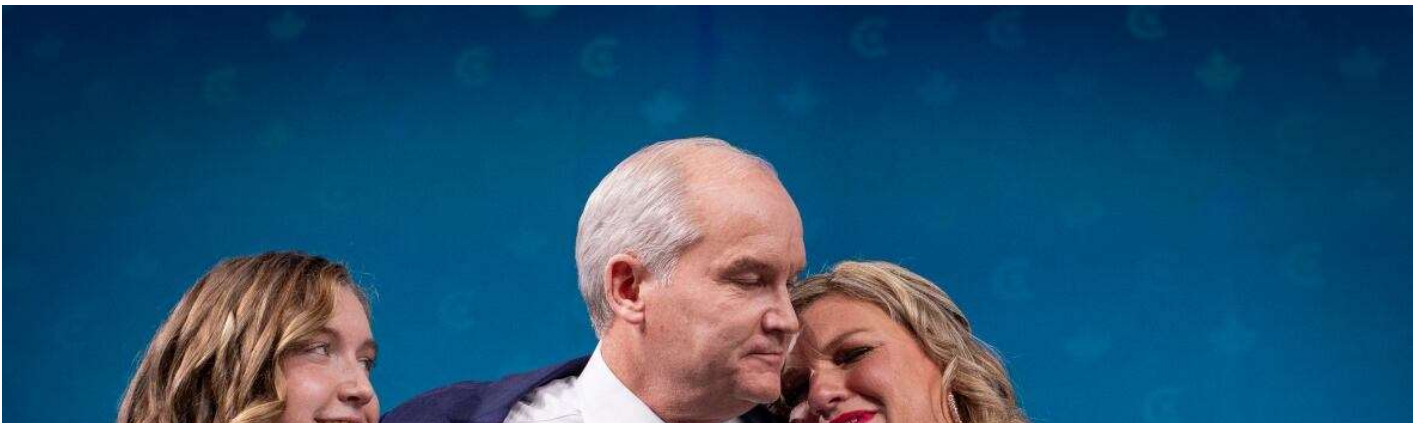
(Evan Mitsui/CBC)

- [PHOTOS | Diwali celebrations light up the streets of Brampton as families gather to celebrate](#)

Conservatives swing and miss in federal election

In this fall's federal election, Canadians once again threw their support behind Justin Trudeau, re-electing a Liberal minority government on Sept. 21.

Addressing supporters at an election night event in Oshawa, Ont, Conservative Leader Erin O'Toole said he had no plans to resign, despite his party seeing little-to-no growth in its vote share and seat count.





(Evan Mitsui/CBC)

- [PHOTOS | Inside party headquarters — Federal leaders, supporters react to election results](#)

Shows and sports return

Before the Omicron variant swept into the city, the summer and fall saw the cautious return of some beloved sports and cultural events.

On July 30, the Toronto Blue Jays had their first home game since September 2020. COVID-19 protocols allowed for 15,000 fans — about 30 per cent of the Rogers Centre capacity.





(Evan Mitsui/CBC)

After a years-long renovation, Massey Hall opened again on Nov. 25. with a performance by Gordon Lightfoot.



(Evan Mitsui/CBC)

- [**PHOTOS | Gordon Lightfoot takes stage at iconic Massey Hall after years-long renovation**](#)

The National Ballet of Canada's Nutcracker also made a short-lived return to the stage.

Before opening night, dancer Tirion Law, as the Sugar Plum Fairy, and principal dancer Siphesihle November, as the Nutcracker, performed at the dress rehearsal for the ballet on Dec. 9. By Dec. 22, all remaining performances had been cancelled due to COVID-19 cases inside the ballet company.



(Evan Mitsui/CBC)

- [**PHOTOS | The Nutcracker returns to National Ballet of Canada for 1st time since 2019**](#)

Finally, after cancelling its 2020 season, the CFL was back this year in a condensed 14-game campaign that culminated with a showdown between Winnipeg and Hamilton.

Here, Winnipeg Blue Bombers linebacker Shayne Gauthier lifts the Grey Cup after the Bombers' 33-25 overtime win over the Tiger-Cats in the 108th Grey Cup in Hamilton on Dec. 12.





(Evan Mitsui/CBC)

- [PHOTOS | Highlights of the CFL's 108th Grey Cup](#)

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